

Cattle Theft Bill passes Texas State Senate

Fort Worth, Texas -The Texas and Southwestern Cattle Raisers Association today applauded the Texas State Senate for passing SB 1163, a bill to increase the penalty for cattle theft in Texas. The bill, introduced by Senator Kel Seliger (R-Amarillo), passed the Senate by a vote of 28-2. "Cattle theft is very active in Texas, especially during tough economic times," Lar-

ry Gray, TSCRA executive director of law enforcement said. "In 2007, 2,400 head of cattle were reported stolen to the Texas and Southwestern Cattle Raisers Association. In 2008, that number jumped to 6,404. Under current law theft of less than 10 head of cattle, horses or exotic wildlife is a state jail felony. SB 1163 would change current law to allow for a third degree

felony." TSCRA has 29 Special Rangers stationed strategically throughout Texas and Oklahoma who have in-depth knowledge of the cattle industry and are trained in all facets of law enforcement. All are commissioned as Special Rangers by the Texas Department of Public Safety and/or the Oklahoma State Bureau of Investigation. TSCRA

Special Rangers primary responsibility is to investigate livestock theft; however, they work alongside local law enforcement agents across the state on numerous criminal cases.

"Thieves are drawn to cattle because of the potential return," Gray continued. "While stealing a car or television will get a thief pennies on the dollar, stealing cattle

can return actual market value within hours. A thief can steal one cow, take it to the auction the same day and receive the value of that animal. The crime is attractive, and in Texas we need a stronger penalty"

According to TSCRA Special Ranger Scott Williamson, most apprehended thieves are repeat offenders. However, because livestock thieves are sophisticated and knowledgeable of the Penal Code, they rarely steal more than ten head at a time.

"The increase in cattle theft is one of the most important issues to TSCRA members," said TSCRA President Dave Scott. "We want to thank Senator Seliger for introducing this critical legislation and working to get it passed in the Senate."

Oklahoma, New Mexico and Louisiana all recognize the significant adverse impact that livestock theft imposes

and have enacted stricter penalties for livestock theft. Thieves know the laws are lax in the number one cattle producing state in the nation, and not surprisingly, cross over state lines to target Texas producers. This poses a significant threat to Texas' \$15 billion a year cattle industry, not to mention the impact on the horse, dairy cattle, sheep, goat, swine and exotic wildlife industries.

Prior to 1993, livestock theft was classified as a third degree felony. In 1993 the Texas Legislature created the State Jail Felony category, also known as a fourth degree felony. Livestock theft has risen since the law was changed in 1993, largely due to the number of repeat offenders who are let out on state jail felony probation.

Now that the bill has passed the State Senate, it will go to the State House for consideration.

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Similar to a lawn and garden show, the annual expo focuses on issues related to land management, wildfire prevention and lawn and garden maintenance. It doesn't matter the question, Texas Forest Expo has the answers.

"It's an opportunity to network and visit with natural resource professionals," Regional Forester Joel Hambright said, explaining that natural resources include water, wildlife, trees and just

about anything else that helps make up forest ecosystems. "There's going to be all kinds of experts there. If attendees have questions, they're going to be able to talk one-on-one with professionals that deal with these issues every day."

Texas Forest Expo is scheduled for April 24-26, 2009, at the Lone Star Convention Center in Conroe. It kicks off Friday with vendor booths and exhibitors only. It then gears up Saturday and Sunday with free classes, live demonstrations and an indoor forest maze located in the Children's Exploration Room.

At the expo, you can learn how to plant and care for your trees, encourage your kids to reconnect with nature and even make money off the carbon stored in the trees on your property without lifting a finger.

With wildfire season in full swing, we'll also have classes dedicated to teach-

ing you how to better protect yourself and your family from the dangerous wildfires that have been ravaging the state. And the Avoid a Second Strike from Hurricane Ike will help you learn how to avoid getting "burned" by increasingly dry and flammable downed trees that still are scattered across the state.

Don't forget to stop by and watch our chainsaw safety and search and rescue dog demonstrations. And make sure you register to win one of our door prizes — including a handcrafted cypress porch rocker and one-night

stay complete with breakfast and golf at La Torretta Del Lago on Lake Conroe.

Texas Forest Expo hours are noon to 5 p.m. Friday, 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. Saturday and 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. Sunday.

For more information, go to <http://texasforesexpo.tamu.edu>, where you can find detailed information about the expo, as well as a class schedule and directions to the event. Also available: an eight-page informational magazine and pre-recorded public service announcements in English and Spanish.



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